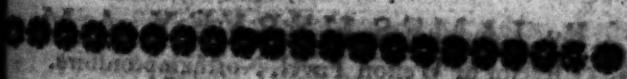


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VINDICATION
OF THE
Evidences and Authenticity
OF THE
GOSPELS.



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REMARKS

ON

Lord BOLINGBROKE's

LETTERS

ON THE

STUDY and USE of HISTORY.

By JAMES HERVEY, A.M.
Rector of Welton Favel, Northamptonshire.

Printed for JOHN and JAMES RIVINGTON.

4

A
VINDICATION
OF THE
Evidences and Authenticity
OF THE
G O S P E L S,
From the OBJECTIONS of the late
LORD BOLINGBROKE,
IN HIS
L E T T E R S
ON THE
STUDY OF HISTORY.

By PETER WHALLEY,
Vicar of St. Sepulchre in Northampton, and late
Fellow of St. John Baptist College in Oxford.

12

— *Fragili, quarens illidere dentem
Offendet solido.* HOR.

L O N D O N,
Printed for JOHN and JAMES RIVINGTON, in
St. Paul's Church-yard. MDCCCLIII.

A
VINDICATION

OF THE

EVIDENCES AND AUTHENTICITY

OF THE

GOSPELS

FROM THE OBJECTIONS OF THE ENEMIES

LORD BOLINGBROKE

IN HIS

LETTERS

ON THE

STUDY OF HISTORY.

PETER WHALLEY,

Member of St. John's College in Northampton, and late
Fellow of St. John's College in Oxford.

Printed by J. Smith, in Pall-mall, near St. James's Church.

LONDON

Printed for J. Smith, in Pall-mall, near St. James's Church.
St. Paul's Church-yard, 1734.

Advertisement.

THE following vindication was begun, soon after I had read the letters which gave occasion to it. They had been published indeed many months before I had the opportunity of seeing them: And the vindication was carried on, as fast as other necessary avocations would permit me to proceed. It would have been offered to the world much sooner, if an intervening accident had not retarded the publication. After I had made a considerable progress, a defence of the Old and New Testaments by the Lord Bishop of Clogher,

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Clogher, appeared in answer to Lord Bolingbroke. This I have hitherto denied myself the pleasure of perusing: but I doubt not that it is executed in so masterly a manner, as to render any further defence of them in some measure unnecessary. Yet as writers on the same subject often take a different method in the prosecution, there may possibly be something in the piece now submitted to the Reader, that the Bishop hath omitted to take notice of. If there should be any thing in common with that, he will truly impute it to an unavoidable concurrence of thought, in vindicating the same truths.

Such

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Such as it is, it is humbly offered as a small tribute to the cause of Christianity, and as an instance of sincere zeal for that divine revelation, which it is equally an honour for every professor to defend, as it is the happiness of every one to believe and practise it.

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in an unavoidable consequence of
thought, in conducting the paper
forward.

Such.

A

VINDICATION

OF THE

EVIDENCES and AUTHENTICITY

OF THE

GOSPELS, &c.

THE hypothesis which lord *Bolingbroke* contends for, with respect to the inspiration of the Old Testament, singular as it appears, is far from being new. One may observe in general, that a *partial* or *occasional* inspiration of the Scripture, is, in effect, no inspiration of it at all : and unless we should suppose the whole to have passed under the divine superintendence and inspection, we shall be at as great a loss to make the requisite distinctions, as we

B should

should be to frame or collect a religion for ourselves.

The objections of his Lordship, which I propose to examine, relating wholly to the evidences and authenticity of the New Testament, do not require of me a vindication of the other: and indeed the defence would be unnecessary, as the cavils of his Lordship have been effectually removed by the performance of a much abler patron; whose labours and whose life are equally devoted to promote the glory of that master, whom he hath the honour to serve*.

To consider his Lordship's arguments in their full extent, it will be necessary to review the connection in which they are placed, and from whence he takes occasion to support his charge. "Dissensions," says he, "of all religions, have

* It is almost unnecessary to inform the reader, that I refer to the *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters*, lately published by my truly learned and ingenious friend, the rev. Mr. Henry of Wotton-Fawcett.

" had great share in the corruption of
 " history * ; and the Christian clergy,
 " in particular, have greatly abused by
 " misrepresentation and false quotation,
 " the history they can no longer cor-
 " rupt †." The accusation, we may
 perceive, is general ; and as easy as his
 Lordship represents the proof, he declines
 to enter or enlarge upon it. The clergy,
 I believe, will put themselves in no
 great pain, from what is thus objected in
 so loose and indeterminate a manner,
 Had his Lordship been more explicit,
 his censures would have deserved a more
 particular refutation : and he ought to
 have reflected, that every man, who
 is induced by prejudice, by interest, or
 passion, to disguise or misrepresent a
 fact, is himself, in those instances, a
 corrupter of the history which he offers
 to the public.

Let us pass then to what his Lord-
 ship hath to say of those, " who may

* Page 174.

† Ibid.

“ be called divines without a sneer;
 “ who believe themselves, and would
 “ have mankind believe *.” My Lord
 is greatly disgusted with the methods
 they have taken to silence infidelity, and
 support the Christian cause. “ It has
 “ been long matter of astonishment,”
 he confesseth, “ how such persons as
 “ these could take so much silly pains
 “ to establish mystery on metaphysics,
 “ revelation on philosophy, and matters
 “ of fact on abstract reasoning. For a
 “ religion,” as he adds, “ confirmed
 “ by prophecies and miracles, appeals
 “ to facts; and the facts must be prov-
 “ ed, as all other facts that pass for au-
 “ thentic are proved †.” I am always
 an admirer of truth, however inelegant
 her dress, or uncourtly her appearance.
 I make no pause therefore in the least,
 to subscribe to the justice of his Lord-
 ship’s remark; though I may reasonably
 scruple the decency of conveyance; and
 the candour of his introduction. I al-

* Page 174.

† P. 175.

low Christianity to be a matter of fact ; and to be proved in the same manner, in which all other facts ought to be proved. I subjoin likewise, that Christianity is not only capable of being thus proved, but is attested with much more illustrious evidence, than any fact whatever of parallel antiquity, or perhaps any in the whole compass of history, is able to produce.

To cure his Lordship's astonishment, I will endeavour to assign a reason for those *filly* pains, which are matter of so great surprize. The truth is, that much *fillier* infidels had affected, what they might call a metaphysical kind of writing, to evince the perfection and immutability of natural religion, with the insignificancy and uselessness of a revelation from God. That no objection from any quarter might pass without its proper confutation, some divines of eminence condescended to answer them in their own way. This they have performed

formed in the most solid and convincing manner.

Yet, though arguments of this kind have properly a place in disquisitions on the being and attributes of God, in discussing the fitness or relation of things, they are undoubtedly no evidence of facts, nor can be brought to determine their authenticity and truth. I do not know that they have ever been so brought. They have been urged, indeed, to detect the fallacies by which infidelity endeavoured to perplex the ignorant and unwary; but they were never rested on as the genuine evidences to ascertain the grand facts, which distinguish the Christian revelation. THEY have proofs appropriated to their Nature: and whilst these are to be had, we neither want nor desire to produce others which are less pertinent or less proper. His Lordship complains, however, " that these proofs are unfairly furnish-
" ed,

" ed, in a manner that creates preju-
 " dices, and gives advantages against
 " Christianity that require to be remo-
 " ved*." What can be his Lordship's
 objections to the manner, in which
 these proofs are brought? If their tes-
 timony is strong and express, where can
 be the unfairness to produce them to
 the world? They have a *right* to be
 heard; they will have *power* to extort
 assent. If they are dubious and weak,
 if false and inconclusive, whatever they
 pretend to be, they are certainly no
 proofs at all. But his Lordship will ex-
 plain his meaning. " *False history has*
 " been employed to propagate Chri-
 " stianity: the *same* abuse of it is still
 " continued; writers copy one another:
 " the mistake that was committed, or
 " the falshood that was invented by *one*,
 " is adopted by *hundreds* †." A par-
 ticular fact referred to, is the evidence
 for the gospel of St. *Matthew*. This is
 said to be cited by *Clemens*, a disciple of

* Page 176. † p. 177.

the apostles, and to be received by *Ignatius* and *Polycarp*. A very eminent prelate, and a learned minister, have both of them affirmed this, in their writings in defence of Christianity.

Now his Lordship presumes they are both mistaken *. “ He questions whether those passages of the gospels, which are to be found in the fathers of the first century, were really taken from the gospels which we now have: and though they are agreeable to what we read in our evangelists, he asks will it follow, that these fathers had the same gospels before them *?”

I will take leave, in my turn, to propose one question: Since we read in the earliest fathers, passages of the gospels conformable to what we now read, will it follow that these fathers had *other*, or *different* gospels before them? Because the critics *Longinus*, or *Dionysius Halicarnassæus*,

Varasseus, cite passages from *Homer*, from *Demosthenes*, or *Plato*, which are similar to what we now meet with in those authors; are we from thence to conclude, that they took them from different or false copies, or that they quoted them from the several writers, who are come down to us, and to whom they are respectively ascribed? I mention this illustration with the greater stress, because it is attended with some circumstances that bear a very obvious similitude to the point in question. Lord *Bolingbroke* was perhaps unwilling to allow such passages to be extracts from the gospels now in use, because they did not literally agree with what is exhibited in the books themselves. He should have considered at the same time, that such accuracy of citation was far from being the practice of the earlier ages. The sentiment of the passage, was the thing principally aimed at; and if that was preserved, they were less solicitous in adhering to the author's words. What

is here remarked, is not peculiar to the Christian fathers, it was the universal custom of all antiquity. The very reverend and learned editor of Longinus declares, that there is scarce a passage, throughout his whole discourse, that is an exact verbal citation from the writer it belongs to*.

If this then was the case, even in works of criticism, where the elegance and propriety of the remark depended often on the structure and arrangement of the words, why should we insist on a more punctual accuracy, in what the fathers quote from the writers of the gospels? or why should we imagine, that such variations must have been owing to these fathers having had *false* gospels before them, or to their having drawn those passages from *unwritten tradition*†?

But

* See bishop Pearce's preface to his edition of Longinus.

† In the epistle of Barnabas; where a passage from the gospel of St. Matthew is cited, it is expressly said

But allowing it to be merely problematical from what gospels they were taken, as we affirm them to be taken from the gospels now read, it is incumbent on his Lordship, who is inclined to believe the contrary, to produce some positive evidence in support of his opinion.

"These fathers then," says my Lord, "made use of other gospels, wherein such passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in unwritten tradition *." I must return an answer to his Lordship's assertion, by retorting the words which he applieth to the bishop and the minister, who affirm the contrary: "To say this, is a manifest abuse of history, and quite inexcusable" in a writer who knew or should have known, that these *other* gospels

to be written; *Attendamus ergo, ne forte, sicut scriptum est, multi vocati, pauci electi, inveniamur.* Barnab. epist. sect. 4.

* Page 178.

were wholly unheard of, were absolutely not in being at the time when these fathers wrote. Rude as this appears, it is my best excuse for the confidence and temerity of the expression *.

The four gospels which we now receive, and those four gospels only, were

* It may possibly be said, in defence of his Lordship, that what seems to be the positive affirmation of a falsehood, was really owing to a lapse of memory. As he wrote without the assistance of many books, he frequently bespeaks the favour of his reader, not to examine the matter with too close an eye; or at least to excuse the imperfections and omissions. I am willing to admit whatever is for the honour of his Lordship's erudition and candour: but was this really the case, it would certainly have been more becoming to have offered his objections with some little degree of diffidence and distrust. His Lordship's memory, I believe, was equally fallible with that of other men: perhaps there are many passages in his letters sufficient to prove this. It may probably be owing to a defect of memory, that his Lordship refers us to the *Chronicon Alexandrinum*, by the name of the *Codex Alexandrinus*; and that he twice calls *George Syncellus* by the title of *George the Monk*. Inaccuracies these, which the censorious and severe may possibly imagine could hardly have proceeded from any other defect but that of knowledge. This remark indeed is something foreign to the present debate, and may be thought only to impeach his Lordship's knowledge in *title* pages. But chronology and history were the subjects he was treating; and if he disliked the author's character or works, it might be expected that he should at least have known his name.

received

received by the fathers of the first and second centuries. By the latter they are cited expressly by name; and they are declared to be neither more nor less than four *. It is not till towards the conclusion of the second century, that we find any mention at all made of other gospels. Of many there is no mention made, till the third or fourth centuries, when the genuine gospels had been long existing in the church, and were alone owned to be authentic and true. The fathers of those ages are also careful to distinguish them from the false gospels at that time in being; and the passages they take from thence, are particularly said not to be found in any of the gospels

* *Neque autem plura numero quam hæc sunt, neque rursus pauciora capit esse evangelia.* Irenæi, lib. 3. cap. 11. p. 220. Edit. Græc.

The arguments he uses to prove that the gospels could not be more or less than four, were agreeable to the genius and reasoning of that age, though possibly they may not be logically true. They serve to shew, however, that the four gospels only were then admitted to be genuine. In the same chapter, the names of the several evangelists are mentioned, and large extracts, agreeable to what we now read, are cited from them.

which

which the church receives. One of the earliest we hear of, after those of the evangelists, is the gospel according to the *Ægyptians* : it is cited by *Clemens of Alexandria*, who died in the third century ; and he remarks, that the passage which he cited was not to be found in any of the four gospels *.

But his Lordship is dissatisfied, that the fathers of the first century did not specify by name the particular evangelist, from whom the quotation is made † : neither do they always name the writers of the Old testament, whose words they borrow. *Clemens Romanus* introduceth in his epistle many citations from the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Pentateuch, without any express mention of the authors or the book. Many passages

* Πρῶτον μὲν οὐκ, οὐ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις τεταμέναις εὐαγγελιστοῖς οὐκ ἔχομεν τὸ πῶς, ἀλλ' οὐ κατ' Ἀγνοίας. Clem. Alex. Strom. 3.—The passage quoted by *Clemens* from this gospel, I shall have occasion to take notice of hereafter, and therefore I omit it here.

† Page 178.

from *St. Paul's* epistles are likewise brought in, without informing us from whence they are taken. Nor is it a rule with *St. Paul*, or with the evangelists themselves, to refer their readers to the old testament for the several places they adopt from thence.

If his Lordship will advance but one step further, he will find there is all the satisfaction to be had, that the most inquisitive, the most scrupulous curiosity can desire. By the fathers of the second century, express testimony is given to the credit and veracity of the gospels: and the writers of each are mentioned, as the several composers of the histories universally assigned them. In *Justin Martyr*, in *Irenaeus*, and in many others, we meet with divers passages, from almost every chapter of the four evangelists. Whence then did *these* fathers receive them, but on the authority of the preceding age, whose evidence they saw no motives to reject? they saw convincing

vincing motives to believe and embrace. The tradition of those apostolical writers, *Clemens, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, with the unanimous attestation of the whole Christian church, placed the authority of the gospels beyond all suspicion. Succeeding christians had no grounds of hesitation; their enquiries were answered; their faith confirmed*.

May I borrow a reflection of his Lordship, not unapplicable to the case

* *Moral* certainty is all we can arrive at in subjects of this nature; and where the testimony is strong and clear, it is equivalent to absolute demonstration. *Traditional* evidence is the only authority, by which we can determine the authenticity of antient books. If the sources of this tradition are pure and uncorrupted, the streams derived from them will be equally untainted. Hence there can be no objection against writers copying one another. The evidence is strengthened by this *successive* attestation: writers of a posterior date, must take their accounts of things from those who lived before them; and the only obligation they are under, is to see that they draw from persons of sense, veracity, and judgment. It is not therefore without reason that *Eusebius* remarks, the heretical gospels were judged unworthy of notice, and were never alledged by those ecclesiastical historians, who had wrote in a gradual succession. Ως ὅτε ἡ ἀλήθεια ἢ συγγραμμάτων τῶν κατὰ διδασκαλίας ἐκκλησιαστικῆς τις ἀντὶ τῆς μνηστὶς ἀγαθῆς ἔχουσιν.

Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. 3. cap. 25.

before

before us? "Divines," says my Lord,
 "object in their disputes with atheists,
 "and they object very justly, that these
 "men require improper proofs, and
 "then cavil that such proofs are not fur-
 "nished*." Something of the same kind
 may, I think, with equal justice be ob-
 jected to his Lordship. He requires a
 multiplicity of express proofs; where,
 in the nature of the thing, such proofs
 are impossible to be had; where they
 ought not with any reason to be de-
 manded or expected. His Lordship
 knew, or might have known, that the
 fathers of the first century are few in
 number; that what remains to us of
 their writings, is inconsiderable in bulk;
 hath been greatly injured by the hand
 of time, and that the subjects therein
 treated, did not lead them to enter on
 a formal proof of the authenticity of the
 gospels, or to vindicate the authority of
 their respective authors. Epistles wrote

with reference to a particular event*, would very unaptly digress to an examination of the credit and authenticity of the gospels. The circumstance did not require, would by no means admit of it. Sufficient is it, if verbal similitudes, or short detached precepts from the evangelical histories, are to be found in any of them; if the style and phraseology of such epistles seem to have been formed by a familiar converse with those sacred writings†. Besides, it is to be considered, that these apostolical fathers addressed the churches under their care, by virtue of their *own* authority; and the precepts or directions, which

* The first epistle of *Clement*, as we learn from *Eusebius*, was occasioned by a dissention in the church at *Corinth*; which is made so much the more probable, when we consider, that *St. Paul* himself openly reproves them for their breach of union and differences with each other.

† On this occasion it is very appositely said by *Mr. Jortin*, *The apostolical fathers rather allude than cite*. *Remarks on Ecclesiast. Hist.* 1 Vol. p. 62. See also what this very ingenious writer offers on the subject, in his *Remarks*, p. 41. & seq. and in his *Discourses on the Truth of the Christian Religion*.

these

these churches were commanded to follow, received a sanction from the venerable character of the bishop or the pastor who enjoined them. Hence there was the less necessity, there was the less occasion to enforce the observance of such precepts, by inferences or examples taken from the history of JESUS CHRIST. If then the *authority* of the evangelists was seldom urged, why should it be matter of wonder, that their *names* were concealed or omitted?

But further, granting with his Lordship that false gospels are mentioned by the fathers, and the writers of ecclesiastical history, doth not this imply, that the *genuine* and *authentic* ones must have *first* existed? Had there been originally no true coin, how could we complain of counterfeit and false*? Was

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* I have generally adhered to the commonly received division of the scriptures into *true* and *false*; but a threefold distinction would, I think, be more just and comprehensive. They were antiently classed into
books

I to have asked his Lordship, on what authority he so readily believes the accounts which are transmitted us of these spurious pieces, he would have answered, I presume, on the authority of those ecclesiastical writers who have given us this intelligence, and whose veracity he had no reason to mistrust or doubt.

books undoubtedly genuine, and which were owned by all; into those of dubious authority; and those which were undoubtedly false. In the number of the former were the *four* gospels, the *acts* of the apostles, the epistles of St. Paul, &c. Amongst the *second*, were the epistles of James and Jude, the second epistle of St. Peter, the second and third epistles of St. John, and the book of revelations. The authority of these books was questioned by some early christians, and admitted again by others. In the number of those evidently spurious, were the gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, and the whole catalogue of heretical scriptures. Now these last-mentioned were as unanimously rejected by the christian fathers, as the former of the three were received without any hesitation. It is true, they have mentioned such pieces to be extant; and they may have casually cited some passages from thence; but never with a view to enforce any doctrine, or to inculcate any article of faith. It cannot therefore be affirmed with propriety, that the fathers made use of other gospels; at least, they did not make the same use of them, which they did of the genuine evangelists. Yet, critically speaking, I must own with Vossius, that the names of *gospels* or *scriptures* is too honourable an appellation to be given to such flagrant impostures.

But

But are not these the writers, who bear equal attestation to the true gospels, and to the character of the real evangelists? Are not these the writers, who hold out to us the torch of truth, and who precisely acquaint us with the difference which his Lordship speaks of? Whence could we have known, that any *pretended* gospels were made use of by the antients, if the information of these authors had been wanting? If their testimony then is relied on in the one case, what should induce us to refuse it in the other? Is the veracity of facts to be judged of as fancy or inclination shall direct us, or to be determined by the weight of evidence, and the harmony of opinions? I desire leave to ask, why was this distinction made, and perpetuated in writing? Was it not to prevent the faithful from being imposed on by the confident designs of ignorance and fraud? Was it not to shew, which were to receive our assent, and which were the devices of imposture and craft? The
primitive

primitive Christians regarded the scriptures of the New Testament as the great Charter of that liberty, wherewith Christ had made them free. It was incumbent on them therefore to be convinced, that what pretended to be a mandate from the King of kings, had really the signature of Heaven. They were concerned to ascertain the validity of their own claims, and the reality of the rights conceded to them. This they were obliged to do: this they *really* did. Far from believing, no previous enquiry being made, their examination was adapted to the importance of the subject, and the merits of the cause to be discussed. The result of their researches we know: what was proved to be divine, was received with reverential gratitude; what was discovered to be otherwise, was rejected with a mark of reprobation. Thus *Eusebius*, a very learned and acute, as well as early critic, placeth the four gospels in the number of

of those sacred pieces, whose authority had never been disputed *.

From the arguments here offered, with respect to the *external* evidences of the gospels, we may pass to those which are *internal*: to those which are furnished by the stile and composition, and the manner of the narration itself. When I mention the evidence arising from the stile and structure of the gospels, I urge it only in a partial view, in comparison with what remains of the spurious and false evangelists: the series of my present reasoning obligeth me to nothing further. Yet I am truly sensible, that very convincing arguments, and much to the advantage of christianity, may be pertinently drawn from these topics.

* Ecclesiast. Hist. lib. 3. cap. 25. where he enumerates those sacred books which were acknowledged by universal consent. To the same purpose is the testimony of Origen; as he is cited by Eusebius, l. 6. c. 25. Μὲν τισὶν αὖτις Εὐαγγέλιον μαρτυρεῖται, ὅτι τὰς ἡγὰρ φησὶ ὡς αὐτὰ παλαιὰ μὲν καὶ τὰς τισὶν αὖτις Εὐαγγέλιον, αὐτὰς μὲν ἀποστόλων ὡς αὐτὰ τὸ ὑπο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐκκλυσθῆαι τὸ ὄν.

The subject hath been treated by divines with a happy perspicuity and force of conviction.

I cannot suppose his Lordship to be a stranger to these reasons: I ought not to presume, that he withstood the several conclusions deduced from thence, in favour of the scriptures: I am unwilling to pay so ill a compliment to his taste and understanding. The whole cast and colour of the gospels are so greatly removed from every thing that bears the appearance of imposture, that still to advance and insist on it, after what hath been so solidly urged to the contrary, must be a very pregnant instance of a weak head, or a worse heart. Whence is that undissembled air of probity and plainness, which marks every page of the divine historians? Doth imposture usually declare herself with that integrity and openness, which prompted them to publish, even the failings and vices of each other to the world? Whence is that

that diffusive ardour and serenity of light, that can no more be counterfeited, than we can rival the genial warmth and lustre of the sun? Truth and sincerity, beaming from the writers hearts, irradiated every sentence with their own unfulled and inimitable splendor. In what human composition, or indeed in any composition but the scriptures, do we meet with the most consummate elegance without design, the most artless simplicity without meanness, and the most exalted majesty without affectation *. The gospels were truly written for our learning ; they were written to make us wise unto salvation. Hence they are accommodated to every apprehension : they are powerful to improve every mind, and to purify every breast ;

* To each of these evangelists we may justly bear the testimony of praises which the *Stoic* applies to the *Philosopher* ; *Τὸ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ σπουδὴν, ὡς Εὐνοῦ.* *Epict.* cap. 25. sect. 2. or the more emphatical confession made by the *Jewish* officers in honour of the GREAT TEACHER of mankind, NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN, *John* vii. 46.

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that

that the conscience being thoroughly purged from dead works, might be turned to serve the living and true God. But is this the character, was this the intention of the apocryphal and forged gospels? Gospels, if we may judge from what hath reached us, that were every where full of *lying wonders*, stuffed with an unintelligible jargon of mystical, unmeaning terms, and purposely designed to propagate the whimsies of conceited heretics, under the sacred names of apostles and evangelists.

The reader will permit me to exemplify an instance from the gospel according to the *Ægyptians*. It is one of the first, and possibly might be the least extravagant and monstrous of any. Let us compare it with a passage of the true gospels, which took its rise from a similar occurrence, and judge which will most effectually recommend itself to the reason of an impartial enquirer: Our

Lord

Lord is related to have been asked, what would be the sign of his kingdom, or when those appearances should happen he had been then describing? To this question he makes the following reply: When two shall be one, and that which is without shall be as that which is within; when the male shall be with the female, and there shall be neither male nor female *.

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* Επειρωτηδης γαρ ο Κυριος υπο τινος, ποτε ηξει η βασιλεια, ηταν· Όταν εγαι τα δυο εν, κη το εξω ως το ενω, και το αρον μετα της θηλειας, ουτε αρον, ουτε θηλυ. I quote this passage as it occurs in the second epistle of *Clement Romanus*, if that be really his; as the words under consideration, in conjunction with other circumstances, may induce us to think it is not, or at least that it hath suffered through the dexterity of some interpolator. The passage itself, with a few immaterial variations, is to be met with likewise in *Clement Alexandrinus Stromat.* 3. He tells us, that the question was proposed to our Saviour by *Salome, Πιθανομηνης της Σαλομης*, &c. and perhaps the obscure manner of the answer, was judged a proper reproof of a disposition too inquisitive and curious to be informed.—Though several women are reported to be in the number of *Christ's* disciples, and probably might perform offices of domestic business and civility, yet we do not find they ever were admitted to that degree of intimacy, as gave them a privilege to enquire into matters of such interesting importance: nor indeed do we read that our Saviour himself gave
particular

I stay not to enquire what is *really* the meaning, or what is *supposed* to be the meaning of this dark and allegorical reply. We may see in how different a manner our blessed Saviour vouchsafed to answer, when his disciples came to him privately, saying, *Tell us when shall these things be *?* It is unnecessary likewise, I imagine, to point out the infinite advantage in which the condescending but authoritative information of our Saviour appears, as reported by the sacred historian.

The apocryphal gospels were known to be the inventions of heretics, deceived themselves, or desirous of deceiving others. It is true, they were rejected

particular intimations of the approaching calamitous period to any but the twelve apostles. None, however, but a bungling impostor, or one who had a mind to be impertinently witty, would have put so momentous a question into the mouth of a woman, undistinguished by any extraordinary favours, or by any intimate relation.

¶ *Matt. xxiv. 3, &c.*

by

by the orthodox ; nor indeed were they much adapted to gain many followers : yet something of this kind they thought it necessary to have ; at least in imitation of, if not in opposition to the gospels of the true evangelists. And some of them submitted to receive a part of these gospels, though they denied the authority of the other. And by this strongest attestation, the testimony of an enemy, they themselves gave credit to those very facts, which they disputed or disbelieved.

The familiar but commanding eloquence of *Cbrist*, comprehended every thing that was proper to excite attention and regard. It taught without asperity or pain ; or rather, the hearers were directed to inform and teach themselves. What was thus taught, it impressed upon the heart with a force as irresistible, as the insinuations were captivating and sweet. His doctrines were of a moral,
should

should I say, or spiritual nature; tending to reclaim men from their vices, and to lead them to happiness by the means of duty. All was intelligible; all was adequate to the human mind: not confounding his disciples with a visionary account of *Æons*, with the operations of *Bythus* and *Sige*, and a more mythological cosmogony than poets ever feigned, or the earliest antiquity ever believed*. Can his Lordship imagine, that doctrines like these met with any reception from the Christian fathers, or that they should be placed in competition with the rational and consistent histories of the four evangelists? Histories, in which are no traces to be found of dishonesty or ignorance; which have every internal character of being composed at the time, when the events related are said to have happened; and which are attested also

* Alluding to the doctrine of the *Valentinian* heretics, of *Basilides*, &c. concerning whom see *Irenæus*, l. 1. c. 1. & seq.

with

with an external evidence, more numerous, and more irrefragable, than profane history hath to offer in its favour. The spirit of *scepticism*, which inclines men to reject what all the world receives, is equally absurd with that undiscerning *credulity*, which receives what every one else rejects. There have been *doubters*, who denied to *Cæsar* the honour of writing his own *commentaries*: an author who, excepting the evangelists, hath perhaps more internal proofs to support his pretensions, than any which that age can produce.

In considering his Lordship's objections, one cannot but observe the prevalence of prejudice, or the power of attachment to a singular hypothesis. Objections, which applied to a classic, would be exploded with the justice they deserve, shall have the force of demonstration when urged against the truth of the scriptures. I may reasonably conjecture,

conjecture, that his Lordship did not scruple to receive the history of *Paterculus*, or the fables of *Phædrus*, as the genuine compositions of the authors whose names they bear. But what evidence could he alledge in their behalf, that in point of real testimony, either as cotemporary or traditional, may compare, in merit or in number, with the attestations which are the basis of the gospel-history. Let the same severity of criticism, that hath been indulged against the sacred authors, be exerted against other antient writings, and which of them will approve themselves to the test, with an equal purity of ore, and with a greater freedom from alloy.

The Christian religion, at its first appearance, wanted not enemies to oppose its progress; nor did those enemies want sagacity to discern, or inclination to detect a forgery. But those enemies themselves agreed, that the Christians had

had antient books or gospels containing their religion ; nor were they ever reproached with forging them, or ascribing them to authors who had no title to such claims. Neither *Celsus*, nor *Porphyry*, nor *Julian*, have objections of this kind to oppose ; and *Trypho* the Jew, who in his dispute with *Justin Martyr*, confesseth he had perused these gospels, as readily owns them to be genuine and true. After so long, so uninterrupted a possession, it may probably be matter of astonishment to find the rights of their authors should be at last contested* ; and the astonishment will naturally increase, when the pretended flaws are discovered to be only the errors of a rash examination, or mistakes of judgment in a hasty censurer.

* Attempts, that are thus made, to abjudicate the gospels from their real authors, remind one of the military imperiousness in *Virgil*, which ejects the antient possessors with a

Veteres migrata Coloni. Eclog. ix.

What I am now going to offer, in further vindication of the sacred text, if considered in all its circumstances, carries in it some degree of weight. The entire preservation of the scriptures, undisguised with any foreign mixture, is a probable argument in favour of their true original. The Divine Providence hath so far interested itself in their conveyance, that they have passed through ages of very different genius and tempers ; they have been handed down by persons of very opposite inclinations and talents, without corruption, without addition, without diminution. What was of God, hath withstood the shocks of time : what was of *man*, hath long been perished in the ceaseless revolution of things. The scriptures of *truth* are the living monuments of Almighty Wisdom, and Almighty Power : but the issues of *deceit*, like their authors, are nothing but a name.

— *Cinis,*

— *Cinis, & manes, & fabula sunt.*

Of all the supposititious books which were published by the heterodox, not one hath reached us whole and untouched. Scarce a part is to be found, sufficiently considerable to engage attention. Titles and fragments are preserved in antient Christian writers; where they appear, not unlike the straws and insects that are inclosed in valuable and precious gems.

The circumstance is deserving our reflection; and the consequence we draw from it, will add strength to the evidences which prove the authenticity of the gospels. Little variations of reading may naturally be supposed to occur, in so immense a multiplicity of books; but the purity of the scriptures is unhurt, notwithstanding the number of these various lections; for they are commonly of very small importance.

The sentiment is unaffected, and not a single article or point of faith is weakened or disfigured by them. His Lordship hath touched on this point, in relation to the old testament. And I greatly differ from his opinion, when I think God hath acted agreeably to the moral fitness of things, in transmitting the sacred records through successive generations. Had they come down to us mutilated and confused; had the text been faulty, or had the general sense been remote from our apprehensions, and interrupted by the loss of necessary passages; complaints might have been brought, with some shew of reason, against the conduct and proceedings of Providence. But in the present case, it can only be objected, that literal or verbal differences are sometimes exhibited by an infinity of different copies; a circumstance impossible to have been avoided, unless God had been pleased equally to guide the hands of copyists and transcribers, with the same unerring certitude,

certitude, wherewith he guided the hands of the inspired penmen themselves.

But his Lordship hath objections of another kind to be proposed; and which, even admitting the *authenticity* of the scriptures, are designed to prove, that these scriptures cannot possibly be the standard of our faith. "Writers," says my Lord, "of the Roman religion have attempted to shew, that the text of the holy writ is on many accounts insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy: I apprehend too that they have shewn it *." *Orthodoxy* is a word whose signification, should I attempt to define it, might possibly occasion a dispute: but as it stands in connection with the rest of the sentence, it ought to be restrained to the faith of the Roman religion. If I may be allowed to take it in this sense, I do agree with his Lordship, that the text of the holy writ is

* Page 179.

greatly

greatly insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy, or of believing as the church of Rome believes. Doctrines, which are the inventions and commandments of men, will in vain be sought for amongst the precepts of God. In this view it is easy to shew, what his Lordship hath here asserted. But if *orthodoxy* be understood to signify the true faith of a Christian derived from the scriptures, then I apprehend the writers of the Roman religion have failed in their attempt. They have *not* shewn, nor will they be ever able to shew, that the text of the scriptures is insufficient to be the criterion of orthodoxy *.

In

* The writer of the Roman church, to whom his Lordship alludes, is, I conjecture, the celebrated father *Simon*; whose obsequious disciple he hath proved himself by the several objections he hath taken from him. When I say this, I would not be thought to enter into any personal reflections, or to cast the least slur upon the moral or religious principles of lord *Bolingbroke*; but I call him the *obsequious* disciple of father *Simon*, as he hath implicitly drawn the greater part, I might say the *whole* of his objections, both against the inspiration and history of the *old* testament, and the sufficiency of the *new*, from that author's *critical*

In proof of his assertion, his Lordship proceeds to set before us the great ambiguity of holy writ; to what different and contradictory purposes the same texts may be applied by different and disagreeing parties. Indeed the representation which he gives us of the scriptures, might lead the ignorant or inconsiderate to imagine, that they were really a mere chaos of words and names; without order, without accuracy, without meaning. "Experience," says his Lordship, "shews abundantly, with

tical history. It will be said, perhaps, that his Lordship had a right to borrow his arguments from whom he pleased; and if they were convincing to himself, he might as justly propose them to the notice and consideration of others. I very readily own it. Yet in a point of such importance, it is incumbent on every *impartial* enquirer after truth, to consider what may be urged on the contrary part, in defence and vindication of the scriptures. Had this been really the case with lord *Bolingbroke*, had he so candidly examined what protestant divines, and especially those of *Holland*, have replied to the histories of father *Simon*, he would not, I presume, have retailed objections that had long been answered in a very solid and satisfactory manner.

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“ how much ease and success the most
 “ opposite, the most extravagant, nay,
 “ the most impious opinions, and the
 “ most contradictory faiths, may be
 “ founded on the same text, and plau-
 “ sibly defended by the same autho-
 “ rity *.”

His Lordship possessed a much greater
 share both of knowledge and experience,
 than what I pretend to: but the little
 portion which I have of either, will not
 permit me wholly to assent to what he
 hath here affirmed. That some passages
 of scripture may be dubious and ob-
 scure, is a fact to which I readily agree:
 but they are passages perhaps, I speak it
 with all reverence and submission, by
 which the salvation of a Christian would
 not be at all endangered, were it utterly
 impossible to ascertain their sense. I
 agree further with his Lordship, that in
 religious disputes the contending parties
 usually carry their appeal to the scrip-

tures. Their authority is owned by both, and would be submitted to by both, as decisive of the point in question. Yet may it not happen [it doth often happen] that texts may be alledged, which are presumed by the one side not to answer the purpose, for which they are brought by the other. And this will be frequently the case, where *truth*, not *victory*, is the end in view; where integrity and candour, not prejudice or passion, direct and moderate the enquiry. It is sometimes difficult to settle the precise meaning of words, in a language that hath been long out of use. Many of the terms will be necessarily obscure; and this obscurity proceeds from our being unable to fix in our minds the same exact ideas, which the authors annexed to those particular phrases, they had occasion to employ. This reflection is applicable to all antient books whatever. Could his Lordship single out any one *classic*, in which *no* passages would be found of dubious and

uncertain meaning? *none* that would minister an occasion of debate and doubt? Numbers may be mentioned, even of the most clear and correct; or, to speak more justly, *none* are to be excepted from this general remark. I will take the liberty, however, particularly to point out one, whose sentiments have given rise to much altercation among critics. Sense and meaning he had undoubtedly; but the labour hath been, to determine that sense and meaning with exactness and precision. The author I design is *Tacitus*, the darling object of his Lordship's study. Every writer hath his peculiarities of stile, and *Tacitus* hath his to a remarkable degree. These, in conjunction with difficulties common to the language, have contributed to create obscurity in places, where it ought least to have been found. Hence many different, many contradictory opinions have had their birth, founded on the same passage, and plausibly defended by the same authority.

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When his Lordship complains therefore, that the interpretation of the scriptures cannot always be laid down with indisputable clearness; or that expositors have differed in the senses they have assigned to particular texts and particular expressions; what doth he say more, in effect, than that the sentiments of authors, who wrote in a language now dead, are sometimes liable to misconstruction, or misinterpretation; and that we cannot explain them with the same advantage and precision, with which we can explicate the terms of a language yet in being, and which is made more familiar by popular use.

But to come still closer to the point. Are these several disputes, these opposite and contradictory faiths, occasioned by the *facts* related by the gospel, or by *doctrines* that may, in some sense, be looked on as posterior to the introduction

of the gospel? Are they occasioned by debates respecting *fundamentals*, and what is really *essential* to the *faith* of a christian; or are they not principally occasioned by the *circumstantial*s of religion; by certain *forms* and *modes* of worship, that are practised by different communions in the church of *Christ*? Do not the greater part of those dissensions, which divide the Christian world, arise from their different opinions with regard to antient *rites*; with regard to *ceremonial* institutions; to points of ecclesiastical government and discipline? And unhappily for Christians, if not for Christianity itself, these disputes have commonly been maintained with greater enmity and ardour, than points which are confessedly of greater importance. Men have combated in defence of systems of their own framing, with a heartier zeal, than they have espoused the interests of genuine and pure religion. The scriptures have been pressed into

into the service, and tortured to speak a language which they never meant.

It is owing to the *weakness* and the *prepossessions* of mankind, that such extravagant or impious superstructures have been raised on a plan the most uniform and simple. The *pride* of science hath often pushed men to attempt excursions, beyond the sphere of limited and finite capacities. Doctrines revealed only in *part*, have given great scope for human ignorance and vanity to expatiate at large: and the conclusions they have formed, were rather an indication of faculties imperfect and confined, than of contradiction in the subjects they attempted to explain. But notwithstanding the diversity of opinions with respect to these articles, or to articles of a similar nature, the Sacred Text hath sufficient clearness, and sufficient accuracy to determine and to fix our faith. Can it ever be a question with the candid and ingenuous reader, whether the *facts* which

which characterize the gospel revelation, are related in a manner that should induce him to *suspend* his assent? Can he hesitate a moment, to pronounce what is there recorded most infallible and certain? As certain and infallible, as that *Divine Spirit* which guided the writers into all truth. Not *Scepticism* itself can *pause*, or the most bigotted *incredulity* demur.

It would be a needless service, or rather an affront to the understanding of the reader, to enumerate every Instance by a particular induction. His own memory and reason will suggest to him proofs sufficient; and from these he will perceive, the assertion is neither arbitrary nor groundless, when we declare whatever is *essential* to salvation, to be *clearly* revealed in the scriptures.

It is probable however, after all, that in the picture exhibited by his Lordship, and which we have been just considering,

ing, he had really in his view a religion the most degenerate and corrupt, that can possibly pretend to the appellation of Christianity. It is not Christianity, as delineated in the Gospel, but Christianity as it appears in the Country where his Lordship then resided, that furnished him with such a representation of it. His Lordship would have us understand him, as describing *Evangelical Christianity*; but by a change imposed upon the reader, he hath substituted *Popery* in the place of it. The sentiments which precede, and the reasonings which immediately follow, naturally lead us to this conjecture. For, as his Lordship proceeds, "Writers of the
 " Reformed Religion have erected their
 " batteries against tradition; and the
 " only difficulty they had to encounter
 " in this enterprize, lay in levelling and
 " pointing their cannon, so as to avoid
 " demolishing in one common ruin
 " the traditions they retain, and those
 " they reject." His Lordship then continues

tinues to represent each Side, as endeavouring to weaken the cause of their adversary, whilst Christianity was jointly demolished by them both*.

Doth his Lordship mean by this, that *all* traditions are equally credible ; or to express his sentiments more justly, equally incredible and absurd ? Or doth he mean to shew, that the writers of the reformed religion have been unable to play off the batteries they planted, or that they have played them off, but without success ? Or lastly, did he design to represent the attempt itself as impracticable and foolish ?

Now I think it is apparent, that the writers of the reformed religion have proceeded in a method not more *successful* than *judicious*. The method was *judicious*, as they have avoided the principal difficulty which, in his Lordship's

opinion, they had to encounter. It was equally *successful*, as Christianity shone out with a more excelling lustre, when the rubbish of tradition was removed. For, to pursue the hint started by his Lordship, their axes were laid not to the *root* of *Christianity*, but to clear away those *shrubs* and *briers* which twined around the tree, mutually contributing to impair its health, and to prevent its growth.

In thus discarding groundless or impious traditions, can his Lordship accuse these writers of being actuated by an *unreasonable* or *unchristian* spirit? Doth he say, they have retained traditions which they ought to have rejected; or that they have rejected those which they ought to have retained? No such matter. The difficulty lay in making the necessary distinction; in adhering to those which were defensible, and in giving up all others as indefensible and false. If this therefore really is done,

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and done with judgment, what detriment can possibly ensue to the interests of Christianity? Neither the clearness of the text, nor the authenticity of the evidences supporting it, are injured or offended by the arguments they have offered. The traditions they rejected, were incongruous with the doctrines of the gospel, and inconsistent with each other; were supported only by a *partial* evidence, whom *interest* had bribed to their favour. Whilst those which they retained, were not only probable and consistent with themselves, but had also the concurrence of unquestionable historical authority to witness for them*.

Suppose this to be the case, Christianity becomes still more accurate and

* When I mention Protestant divines as retaining *some* tradition, I mean no more than the accounts transmitted us by ecclesiastical historians of the authors and evidences of the New Testament; and these in his Lordship's phrase may be called, though improperly enough, *written* traditions. For as to *oral* traditions, or stories derived from we know not who, and supported by we know not what authority, and with respect to doctrines which are built upon them, Protestants with justice *reject* them all.

more

more precise. The multiplicity of erroneous glosses, which tended to create confusion, are entirely removed: the light of the gospel is made more uniform and steady; we neither wander in the dark for want of it, nor are we under the necessity of following those false fires, which the imagination of *credulous* or *designing* men had set up for the direction of others. The consequence therefore which his Lordship draws, to the prejudice of the sacred text, is neither natural nor just; and that *terrible* dilemma, as he styles it*, is rendered perfectly *innocent* and *harmless*. Christianity hath all the necessary clearness and authenticity to establish it, as a certain rule of faith and practice; and if corrupt traditions have at any time vitiated the belief of Christians, it hath been owing to their not recurring to the scriptures, as the genuine criterion of their faith; and the only *infallible* guide in

points of controversy. It is by no means a necessary consequence, that Christianity was not originally of *Divine* institution, because the purity and splendour of it may have been casually sullied by the mixture of human traditions. The ore is easily separated from the dross; and the gospel, the true standard of a *right faith*, remains uncorrupted with any foreign appendages, the inventions of worldly policy and craft.

I apprehend also, that his Lordship hath mistaken the nature of our Saviour's promise to his church; wherein it is declared, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. Our Saviour did not mean, that no dissensions should distract his church; that it should perpetually continue in a state of *unity*, undisturbed with heresies and schisms; or in a state of *peace*, unvexed with the fury or the arts of persecution. This was a blessing which the *militant* condition of the church had little reason to expect:

expect: it is reserved for the *triumphant* period of the church of Christ. But the prophetic promise of our Saviour was designed to shew, that notwithstanding the *weakness* of his disciples, and the *malice* of his enemies, the gates of hell should not prevail against it; should be unable to extirpate his religion from the profession and the hearts of men. And indeed history might have informed his Lordship, that in the darkest ages, in a time when the purity of the gospel was the most contaminated, there were those who maintained the integrity of their faith, agreeable to evangelical simplicity. But had the case been otherwise; had the real beauty of Christianity been wholly overclouded or defaced, the powers of hell would be defeated, would fail to accomplish their intended purposes; whilst the belief of *redemption* through a Saviour continued to be an article of the Christian faith, the basis of Christianity was firm and unshaken: and this CAPITAL ARTICLE of the Gospel

pel did not lose its vital influence, notwithstanding the oppressive load of traditions under which it groaned. And supposing further, that the faith and morals of the Christian world were degenerated to the most extreme depravity, yet Christianity in its most degenerate appearances, and under the most corrupt forms in which it hath ever been administered, is infinitely superior to the impurities of Heathenism, and deserveth on every account to be preferred before it.

The Gospel, as a law or rule of life, contains things likewise to be done and practised, by all who submit to its authority. Moral precepts, precepts respecting society, with private offices and duties, are enjoined to every one: Now these should be particularly *plain* and *clear*; should be expressed in a manner that will allow no room for ambiguity and doubt. And could his Lordship *seriously* say, that they are not so? Could he

he say, that they either exceed the level of common understandings; or that it is difficult to ascertain their meaning? Never were any injunctions delivered in a manner less liable to perversion, or more obvious and easy to be apprehended. No rules of life, calculated for general observation, and to operate on the bulk of mankind, were ever laid down with a happier perspicuity, or enforced by an authority more irresistible or more affecting. The rules are short, clear, and comprehensive: the sanctions which bind us to the performance, are of a nature peculiarly adapted to excite our hopes and fears, and to actuate the several springs within us.

A diligent advertence to these precepts, where the heart is uninfluenced by that knowledge which puffeth up, will naturally produce in us the proper force of religion; that force which, as his Lordship well expresseth it, subdues the mind, and awes the conscience by conviction.

conviction. But to acquire this force, or to give it a proper authority, the will must be restrained, and the passions controuled. Where either of them exercise undue degrees of power, the dictates of reason and religion will be equally neglected: the understanding will be indisposed to assent to proofs, reasonable in themselves, and compatible with the subject; the affections will cease to be moderated by any lessons of wisdom, or checked by the hopes or dread arising from futurity. For it should always be remembered, that the *proofs* of Christianity, though highly reasonable and convincing, have not that *self-evident* and *over-ruling* power, which will *necessarily* compel us to receive them. They are not *irresistible*; they may be *rejected*. Yet this proceeds not from the *defect* of evidence, but from some previous *incapacity* of mind in the enquirer himself; either prejudice or vice are usually at the bottom of such a total rejection; whilst the *secret* of the Lord

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is amongst them that fear him. There is *merit* even in *believing*, as it indicates a proper *application* to the subject, and our examination into the nature of the proofs which are alledged in its support. An evidence which *extorts* assent, may in some cases be our *happiness*, but cannot be our *virtue*, or the *trial* of our disposition and readiness to receive what is proposed to us upon just and reasonable grounds.

I have now gone through with the most material objections, which the noble Lord hath made to the credibility and sufficiency of the gospels. The answers I have given are what I take to be *really* true, or what have prevailed with me, from their likeness and resemblance to truth. If then it should happen that I deceive *others*, it will be because I am deceived *myself*. But whatever may be their power of conviction, I have endeavoured to be accurate in examining, impartial in selecting, and

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honest

honest in communicating the proofs. I might now dismiss the subject to the reader's reflections, on the *sincerity* and *learning* of his Lordship; and leave him to pronounce judgment between us, as the evidence on either side inclines him. But as the noble Lord, out of his *singular* zeal for Christianity, hath advanced some other positions which deserve our animadversion, I shall proceed to consider what he hath added further on this head.

"The resurrection of letters," saith his Lordship, "was a fatal period: the Christian system has been attacked, and wounded too, very severely since that time*." And he tells us in another place, that "Christianity has been in decay, ever since the resurrection of letters†." Had the matter been of small importance, it would have been perfectly indifferent to me what

* Page 182.

† Page 185.

were his Lordship's sentiments on this point, and whether they were true or false. But as the truth of this assertion will bear hard upon the cause of Christianity, the falsity of it will not bear less hard upon the knowledge and veracity of Lord *Bolingbroke*. If we suppose it true, it implieth that Christianity is unable to stand the test of a strict impartial scrutiny: That consequently, the reception which it met with in the world, must have been owing to the ignorance of zealots, the artifice of priests, or the compulsive power of magistrates and rulers. That when the eyes of men were opened, and they had liberty to judge for themselves, they immediately saw through the delusion, and generously laboured to open the eyes of others. I am satisfied, however, that his Lordship could not affirm this, whatever he might design, of genuine and pure Christianity: He might apply it indeed to that corrupt species of religion which was mentioned before. It is *true* that

Popery hath been in decay, ever since the resurrection of letters; but then it is as *certain*, that *Christianity* itself revived together with letters; hath flourished together with them, and will continue to flourish, whilst *real* learning and *impartial* criticism shall direct the enquiries of all who are willing to be informed.

I do acknowledge, with his Lordship, that the Christian system hath been furiously attacked since the period he speaks of. And I own further with him, that the defence in general hath been
 “ better made by modern divines, than
 “ by antient fathers and apologists.
 “ The moderns have invented new methods of defence, and have abandoned some posts that were not tenable.” And this advantage Christianity hath reaped, from the efforts of its adversaries. The arguments in defence of it, and the principles of the Christian faith, have been explained in a clearer,
 a more

a more rational, and a more intelligible manner. The severer the trial hath been, so much the more illustrious hath the religion of Christ appeared. Nor do I scruple to say, that we are probably in possession of some arguments, which those antient apologists and fathers wanted; or which, if they had them, they neglected to urge in their proper strength and spirit. Such are the accomplishment of scripture prophecies, and those in particular which relate to the destruction of *Jerusalem*, with the dispersion and state of the *Jews*. Nay, I reckon the defection of men from the gospel, which is manifestly foretold by the apostles, to be no inconsiderable proof that this religion is a Divine Institution, or was originally dictated by the Spirit of Holiness and Truth. The Providence of Almighty God seems to have adapted proofs of the Christian dispensation, suited to the various ages, and the different exigencies of his church. Miraculous attestations, so necessary to
work

work on those who were the first converts to Christianity, and the witnesses of its introduction in the world, were given in the most abundant effusion, when the period most required it. The accounts of these miracles, punctually recorded, and as faithfully transmitted, are offered to the reason and judgment of succeeding generations. At the same time, predictions from God gradually opening, and receiving their accomplishment, come in as a kind of *supplemental* evidence; they are more peculiarly accommodated to the conviction of those, who live in an age remote from the primary propagation of this religion in the world. Whilst prophecies yet unfulfilled, as, for instance, amongst others, the future restoration of the *Jews*, will be vouchers for the gospel, to those who will be alive at that period, and perceive that all will be exactly verified.

But, saith his Lordship, "Christianity hath been severely wounded." I

ask in what parts hath it been wounded? It hath been attacked indeed with outrage; yet have any of the articles of *true* Christianity; any of the *facts* related by the gospel, been proved to be improbable or false? The most industrious and sharp-sighted enemy against it, hath not yet been able, and, I trust, never will be able to demonstrate this. It will be said, however, the number of *believers* is diminished; *infidelity* hath gained many converts, which the gospel hath lost. I once more ask, whether every *theist* is led, from the sense of *conviction*, to believe the reasons urged against the gospel, superior to those which are urged in its behalf? Hath not an indolence in thinking; the want of inclination; or abilities to go through a regular deduction of arguments, been frequently the occasion of not embracing Christianity? *Singularity* hath made many *theists*: the affectation of appearing wiser than the vulgar; and many more, the affectation of appearing equally wise with others,

others, whom they esteemed of greater penetration than themselves. Above all, the gospel hath often been rejected, in order to throw off the several restraints, which the persuasion of its truth will lay upon every believer.

In supporting Christianity, his Lordship declares further, "there are some posts, in defending which the moderns lie under great disadvantages. Such are various facts, piously believed in former times, but on which the truth of Christianity hath been rested very imprudently in more enlightened ages*." I wish his Lordship had been pleased to mention *some* of those *various* facts, to which he here alludes. If he means the miracles said to have been wrought after the days of *Christ* and his apostles, and the supposed continuance of those powers in the earlier ages of the church; I allow that

the truth of Christianity hath been very imprudently rested upon them, in any age whatever. The falsity of many of those facts, and the gross improbability of others, have been made extremely evident. There is no sort of connection between them, and the genuine attestations of the gospel. They are wholly independent of each other; and those *Gothic* buttresses are easily removed, without injury to the fair and well-proportioned structure of Christianity. To maintain these facts, or to place them upon an equal footing with the miracles of our Saviour, must necessarily expose the defenders to great and unavoidable disadvantages. Nor did his Lordship, I hope, design any comparison between the former of these facts, and those which we agree to reject. Yet there is room for this suspicion, as he thinks they cannot be defended, but by the united forces of all the *clergy* in *Christendom*.

"It is high time," he says, "the clergy
"in all Christian communions should

K

" join

“ join their forces, and establish those
 “ historical facts which are the founda-
 “ tions of the whole system, on clear
 “ and unquestionable historical autho-
 “ rity, such as they require in all cases
 “ of moment from others.” I most
 readily own this to be a point of the ut-
 most consequence and moment. That
 these facts, however, have been esta-
 blished, and upon clear, unquestionable,
 historical authority, is what the advocates
 for Christianity may justly boast in ho-
 nour of their cause. I should be glad
 to add likewise, that their enquiries
 have been pursued in the same spirit of
 truth, through all ages of the church.
 Yet something of this kind hath been
 done too : and whenever the enquiry
 shall be pursued, let it be carried on in
 the manner which a candid examiner
 hath laid down, as the most effectual
 and just. Not to pronounce those things
 false, which may perhaps be true ; nor
 those things certain, which are only
 probable ; nor those things probable,
 which

which are ambiguous: and to try the experiment, whether by this method a reader may not be gently led, to grant all that is required of him, and rather more than less*.

Implicit faith is very little to the taste and genius of the present age: I am confident Christianity requires no such thing. Her advice to her disciples is, that they should be able to render to every man a reason of the hope that is in them†. None of those facts, which are the foundations of the system, were done in a corner; nor is it necessary now, they should be kept from the light, or with-held from the public examination. We leave it to the superstition of *modern Rome* to emulate the *credulous piety* of the *antient city*, and to deem it a part of religious reverence, rather to receive

* Mr. *Jortin's* Preface to the first volume of *Remarks, &c.*

† *1 Pet.* iii. 15.

with faith the histories and the acts of her saints, than to learn the truth of them by a critical enquiry*.

Should we believe his Lordship, Christianity is a tottering system, void of all real support, and hardly able to keep upon its legs. But the truth is, that *Christian, Jewish, and Heathen* writers join with mutually concurrent testimonies, to corroborate the principal facts which are the basis of the whole. And whoever can be prevailed on to doubt, whether there was truly such a person as *Jesus Christ*, whose history is related by the four Evangelists; who is said by them to have performed the most miraculous operations, and at length to have been crucified by the fury of the *Jews*, and the permission of the *Roman* governor; he may equally doubt, whether there was ever such a person as *Julius*

* *Sanctius ac reverentius visum de actis Deorum credere, quam scire. Tacit. de Mor. German. c. 34.*

Cæsar, who after many military actions and enterprizes, described in history, is reported to have been at last assassinated in the senate-house. In short, no fact, or series of facts in history, can have evidence sufficient to secure *his* assent, who can be tempted to believe, that the *grand facts* of Christianity are destitute of sufficient attestation, or that the historians which report them are unworthy of our faith and credit.

In thus examining the objections of Lord *Bolingbroke*, I have been wholly guided by a love for *justice* and for *truth*. The desire of doing *justice* to the cause of the Christian religion, and of subserving the general interests of *truth*, independent of any particular bias or attachment whatsoever. Although belonging to an order, which his Lordship compliments with the title of *The irritable race of men**, I have conceived no

* Surely, my Lord, the Clergy have a better title than the sons of *Apollō*, to be called *Genus irritabile vatum*.

passion

passion against his opinions, nor am I angry with the noble Lord, because we differ in the points disputed, or in our sentiments of the church and clergy. Yet it hath grieved me to see an accomplished genius employed in the little arts of chicane and deceit, and doing *real* prejudice to Christianity, by assuming the character of a *real* friend. Nor could I help observing, from the instances which have passed under consideration, how truly he hath answered the conjecture of his sagacious friend, who had the discernment to foresee, that if ever lord *Bolingbroke* proved a *trifler*, it would be when he turned a *divine**.

Mr. *Pope's* Letters to Dr. *Swift*.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

In page 23, Note, *μαλυσας*, read
μαλυσαι.

In page 25, Note, *of praises*, read, *of
praise.*

E R R A T A

In page 23. Note, suggested read

In page 25. Note, suggested read, &
page